

**Learning  
to Live**

**The Importance  
of London's  
Youth Services**

**A Conference sponsored by  
John Lyon's Charity  
2003**

## **John Lyon Conferences and Seminars**

at Harrow Club W10

The following seminars have been presented to audiences invited from projects supported by the Charity and other interested groups.

**Education in the Inner City** June 2001  
**Continuing Learning: From Prison to Work** January 2002  
**How Local Government Works** May 2002  
**How Schools Are Funded** May 2002  
**How Schools are Funded (repeat)** October 2002  
**Making Better Grant Applications** November 2002

### **Strengthening Management Committees**

takes place in September 2003

Further details of the above seminars  
may be obtained from  
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## Foreword

Youth Services were at one time the biggest beneficiaries of John Lyon's Charity. Since 1992 the Charity has given over £3 million towards the improvement of youth clubs and for the cost of youth workers. But the annual level of support has declined sharply – from 25 per cent of income in 1995 to seven per cent of income in 2003.

There has been increased competition from sports and arts based projects. The Connexions Service promotes a new way of reaching hard-to-reach young people through a network of personal advisors. Meanwhile a series of Ofsted's of Local Authority Youth Services in Inner London revealed a picture of poor attendances, inadequate premises, untrained part-time staff, weak management, and a lack of educational content in provision for young people. Judging from these reports it is hard not to conclude that youth work in London is in crisis.

The Charity's response to this disturbing state of affairs was to convene another in its series of seminars aimed at learning directly from the experience of practitioners on the ground whose work it has funded. (Previous seminars have looked at education in the inner city and prisoner education.) *From Youth Service to Connexions?* took place at Harrow Club W10 in Notting Dale on 20 March 2003. There were 35 participants – youth workers, local authority officers and elected members, service managers, funders and others involved in working with young people. They came mainly from the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea and the City of Westminster, with additional representation from the London Boroughs of Hammersmith & Fulham, Camden and Barnet. The local constituency member of parliament, **Karen Buck**, MP for Regents Park & Kensington North, delivered the keynote address. The panel of speakers included **Linda Neal**, Team Leader of Youth Services at the Government Office for London (GOL), **Ian Comfort**, Director of Community Education in Kensington & Chelsea, and **Helal Uddin Abbas**, Leader of Tower Hamlets Council.

In his opening remarks **Nick Stuart**, the Chairman of the Charity and Conference Chairman, who once had the responsibility for translating the Cabinet Office report *Bridging the Gap* into the Connexions Service, said that the aim of the Conference was “to inform our understanding of an area in which we already have invested, will continue to invest and want to go on investing – but we would like to know something of the current issues and problems that you face”.

The ensuing discussion was “lively”. Strong feelings were aroused among the many youth workers present. Why do we have to change? Is “generic” youth work, with its emphasis on recreation, under threat? Which age range should we be dealing with? Why should youth work be educational? Is there any room for fun? And what is the role of Connexions? Will it work alongside the Youth Service or replace it?

Controversies surrounding the nature and purpose of youth work are not new. Regarding the appropriate age range, **Ian Comfort** cited one of the first Government reports *The Outlook for Youth Work*, 1948:

*Strictly speaking, the business of Youth Services is not with age groups at all, although it may be convenient for youth organisations for certain limited purposes to*

*classify their members according to age. Such classifications can soon become a danger because they are allowed to obscure the more weighty consideration. Each boy or girl, who enters the youth organisation, comes in with a unique background or history and uniquely developing characteristics.*

Should youth work be compensating for the failure of the education system? The 1948 report says:

*in fact, if youth work is to try to put right the blunders of earlier education it will consume its energies in tasks that are sometimes impossible and always wasteful. Its proper task is not curative, it lies in prevention and positive cultivation.*

As for the current trend to accreditation leading to “identifiable outcomes”, it is worth recalling that the Harrow, Rugby and Stowe school missions for Notting Dale and the surrounding poor areas of London were doing accredited youth work over a century ago. Cups, badges, certificates and prize-giving ceremonies abounded. Ian Comfort recalled how “in the Boys Brigade I got lots of badges on my arm – what I would call accreditation – and yet a century later we're still talking about accrediting youth work.” Yet it was clear from the Conference that these issues are still very much alive.

The recent Government report *Transforming Youth Services* (2003) expresses a continuing commitment to the Youth Service. But this commitment is conditional on youth workers adopting a structured, educative, curriculum-based and outcome-driven approach, which many feel goes against the grain of generic youth work. Then there is the role of the local authorities and the voluntary sector within local partnerships. Helal Uddin Abbas's talk on the outsourcing of Youth Services in Tower Hamlets described a management process which some may feel represents a new and unwarranted challenge.

What follows is a series of edited excerpts from the conference panel presentation and discussion workshops. They are not arranged chronologically but hopefully they will give a flavour of the debate that took place over issues that Youth Services in London need to resolve if they are to maintain the support of elected members, funders and the wider public.

David Robins  
John Lyon's Charity  
September 2003

## The Cinderella Service

**Linda Neal** (Government Office for London):

The Youth Service has traditionally been a Cinderella service, starved of funds and of focus. The Government report *Transforming Youth Work* is a real glimpse of sunlight, but there are lots of challenges too. This is the time to question what we have done and how we can do it better. The old answers are not always right. We need to ask, when we are working with young people, "What's the purpose? What's the impact? What's the outcome? Can everyone take part? What are the barriers to access and how can they be overcome? To ensure that everyone can take part, do we need to target particular communities? What is it that every young person is entitled to have access to, if they choose?"

**Betty Muspratt** (Fourth Feathers Youth Club Westminster):

We have been around for 130 odd years. Being old doesn't mean being no good. It does mean you have survived and you have probably provided what kids locally want. The new way is all about education. Activities like football are considered marginal. The fact that we have got 140 kids going away at the weekend is "OK", but we are asked "What is the learning outcome?" So we fill in the forms and tick the boxes. Rather than "Well done, you are doing a great job", it is a critical view of what we are doing. And to add insult to injury the Government wants to change the way we work yet funds a fraction of what we need to run the club.



**Nick Stuart**  
Chairman, John Lyon's Charity

**“I agree that the cost of piling money into Connexions – not enough in my view – has been to price some workers out of some markets, and that ought to be tackled by partnerships.”**  
**“The hardest thing I've ever done is to seek cooperation from about 16 different Whitehall Departments for the Connexions Service, which is about partnership. What worries me is that at local level the strength of partnership varies widely. The way the voluntary sector is treated in those partnerships can vary between the benign to the enthusiastic to the downright disastrous.”**

**Paul Whittle** (St Andrews Youth Club Westminster):

My club is 138 years old. I feel that I am now being told that the organisation I work for and my long personal experience don't count for much, and that I as a worker have got to start changing – or else – and the Club is under threat if we don't change.

**Ian Comfort** (Director of Community Education in Kensington & Chelsea):

Connexions, Excellence in Cities, the Behaviour Improvement Programme, the Children's Fund, the Youth Offending Team, and Young Persons Advisors under the Children Leaving Care Act. All of these programmes involve one-to-one-advisors. But what are we investing in *group* activities? Youth work is not just about one-to-one work but work with larger groups of young people.



**Andrew Cain**  
Chairman, Kilburn Youth Centre

**“Small Voluntary local groups are reluctant to apply for funding fearing they cannot meet the regulations and restrictions.”**

**Betty Muspratt:**

You can't get youth workers because it's cushy being a one-to-one advisor. Who wants to go into a rough and lively youth club with loads of challenges every night?

**John Grosse** (Townmead Youth Club, Hammersmith):

You can't hire a youth worker and expect him to do the youth work, manage the building, and fill in the assessment forms for Connexions and all the other documentation. He won't have any time left to do youth work.

**Andrew Cain:**

As well as causing frustration among existing youth providers, some of the bureaucratic changes being imposed are actually preventing volunteers from being involved.



**Martyn Kempson**  
Former Director of Education & Youth Services in Barnet

**“The Youth Service is just too important to leave to Chief Executives and borough councillors who often see the service as a soft cut in the annual budget round.”**

**Karen Buck MP:**

There have undoubtedly been perverse consequences to the growth of regenerative programmes like the Children's Fund, Sure Start, Single Regeneration Budget and so on. The explosion in work opportunities can mean that front line, bread and butter services are being denuded of staff. Clearly that is a message for myself and for the Government.

## The Right Age

**Ian Comfort:**

Youth work is about transitions from primary to secondary school, from childhood to adolescence, from adolescence to adulthood. It changes with different individuals because some youngsters mature earlier.

**Paul Whittle:**

If you don't start with positive contact with your organisation with a younger, broader base, then you don't have the opportunity to have a generic youth work setting by the time they're 13. We talk about what we're going to do with young people between 13 and 19, how we're going to link to Connexions, but you have got to get them to come in first. And that means providing a safe and reasonably controlled environment for young people.

## Educational Youth Work?

### Ian Comfort:

When Youth Services compete with the budget for schools I know who is going to win. Yet we are told that youth work has to be educative because young people are failing the school system. The Youth Service is not here to pick up the failures of schools. Youth Services are unique. They offer young people the opportunities for growth *voluntarily*.

### Ian Baxter (Somers Town Youth Club):

We are told that, like teachers, we have to work from a curriculum. But unlike in school our kids don't have to attend. To them curriculum has got a bad name from the National Curriculum. The word has too many associations with school to have an application to youth work.



**Councillor Helal Uddin Abbas**

Leader of Tower Hamlets Council

**“Tower Hamlets is the most improved education authority in the country. And the improvement is linked very strongly with the investment in our youth service.”**

### Abdul Momen (Greenwich University):

The term “curriculum” is unfortunate in relation to youth work. It is associated with syllabuses, with subjects taught in school. But working from a curriculum allows us to get to the purpose of youth work, whether it is a Christmas party, or a football game, or a residential, or just hanging out around a pool table, whatever you do with young people, that is your activity, that is the curriculum which you have set and you need to ask “What are those young people getting out of this?”

### Linda Neal:

Is good curriculum planning in youth work really the end of all fun? No. Take games and sports. They involve a “curriculum” of developing teamwork, learning about rules and boundaries, developing a sense of fair play, and dealing with failure and success in competition.



**Abdul Momen**

Senior Lecturer in Youth & Community Work, Greenwich University

**“I don't know of any youth service which hasn't something called curriculum, if we understand 'curriculum' as any plan of activities asking 'how well does the curriculum meet the needs and interests of young people'.”**

### Sharon Cohen (Head of Westminster Youth Service):

Why does curriculum-led youth work have to be different to what young people want or what we can offer as good quality youth work? In Westminster we have carried out a survey of young people's needs. We have listened to them and what they have said is that they want to have fun but they want to learn while they're having fun.

## The Role of Local Authorities

### Ian Comfort:

It is important that the Youth Service has the support of the elected members. When the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) transferred its Education Services to Kensington and Chelsea, the councillors in the borough were committed to supporting young people. They have consistently shown that support by putting their money where their mouth is.

### Helal Uddin Abbas (Leader of Tower Hamlets Council):

In Tower Hamlets seventy percent of our young people are from a black/minority/ethnic (BME) background. Their needs are changing dramatically but we inherited a youth service from the ILEA which was outdated. Many of our buildings needed to be updated. It is a legacy that is faced up and down the country, not least London. When I became a councillor the Youth Service was a mess. When you talked to young people they rubbished it. When you talked to youth workers they felt very depressed. When you talked to some voluntary sector partners, they felt it was a waste of money. In the past expectations had been raised and dropped. As a Council we needed to do something fairly dramatic. Outsourcing was the process that we went through.

We were keen to build the capacity of our voluntary sector which is run by people who are no less capable than some of our council officers. We wanted a responsive service, a new approach to service delivery that focused on overall strategy, quality assurance and service development.

A specification was drawn up in consultation with staff, unions and council departments and which covered Ofsted's curriculum needs to transform the youth service.

We started with 11 pilot projects commissioned with the voluntary sector. We gave them time to demonstrate that they can deliver. You cannot turn a failing service around overnight and you cannot also do it without investing.

There was a big fear that private companies would make a profit. In fact 50 per cent of the service was outsourced to existing providers. The rest went not to private companies, but nationally accredited youth service providers. The feedback is that there are more training opportunities, the lines of accountability are clearer and it is much more productive to work for smaller organisations.



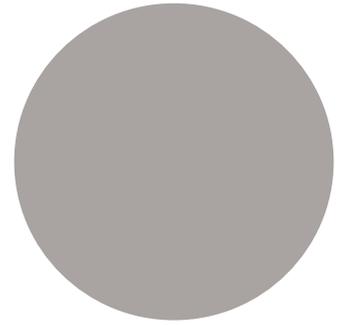
**Linda Neal**

Team Leader of Youth Services,  
Government Office for London (GOL)

**“Challenging, often very difficult, young people making small but significant improvements, increasing their capacity to resolve conflict, being helped to move into further education, training and employment or gain accredited awards, recognising the progress they’ve made, displaying new found confidence for the future. It is clearly a bright future for any borough or organisation that can achieve those objectives.”**

**Nick Stuart:**

The way in which education standards are improving in Tower Hamlets is linked in part to the way in which the youth service has improved. I just do not think it is a case of failing kids at schools and dumping them on the youth service. That might be the perception, but I don't think it's the reality. In Tower Hamlets, the way in which the process has evolved has led to an extremely creative relationship with the voluntary sector. That's not true everywhere in the country.



**Ian Comfort**

**“Young people want to engage with youth work because they want some fun, they want to associate with their friends, they actually want to do things, and they want to take part in activities. They do not just want to speak on a one-to-one basis with their personal advisor. Unless we fund the doing of something, the personal advisors can talk till the cows come home.”**

**Martyn Kempson:**

Local government boundaries are irrelevant to young people in their search for quality youth provision. All too often neighbouring London boroughs have widely disparate services, conflicting policies and spending and staffing levels. It's a postcode lottery! What is needed is a pan-London youth service to bring consistency, efficiency and economy that will ensure a minimum entitlement for all young people regardless of their current address. There would be one policy on access to services and funding guaranteed far enough ahead to encourage investment and utilisation of the very specialist and essential skills of youth workers. The economies would come not from the current annual budget round of shortsighted cuts but from a reduction in the duplication of administrative costs.



**Karen Buck**

MP for Regents Park & Kensington North

**“There has to be a contribution from the local authority. We have to make sure that ‘partnership’ is fully understood if we are going to protect and improve the resource base for the delivery of Youth Services in Inner London.”**

**Ian Comfort:**

We've got to spend money. There's no capital fund for youth work buildings. If the Government wants to respond, give us a capital budget. Let's fund some upgrade of our facilities. Schools get it, why shouldn't we? If you really want to transform it, let's put some resourcing into some highly qualified, excellent practitioners, paid on salaries which reflect what it costs to live in London, to come in and do youth work with young people.

If you are serious about transforming youth work, then put your money where your mouth is.

## Conclusions

### Learning to Live

Good youth work is about assisting young people in the business of learning to live. Because of their unique skills and abilities to “listen” and to reach the NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training), youth workers are increasingly being deployed to work with those in most need of assistance – the so-called “school failures”. There have already been a number of ‘inclusion projects’ in London and nationally where the youth service, in conjunction with schools, has worked effectively with young people who are either temporarily excluded or are at the point of exclusion from school. Funding should be targeted at interventions where the Youth Services and the schools work closely in partnership.

### Working with Connexions

The youth service has a distinctive role working with Connexions and has particular expertise in terms of strong local knowledge and the ability to work with hard-to-reach groups. However, there needs to be some parity in salary levels to tackle the disproportionately large number of youth workers who are leaving the Youth Service for better paid posts with Connexions.

### The Age Range

The age range for youth work should focus on the key transitions in young people’s lives, that is, from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood. However, there are concerns about not being able to work with 10 to 12 year olds who are going through the transition from primary to secondary schooling. Ideally work with young people who are likely to become disaffected should start earlier than age thirteen as by then it may be too late for effective personal and social developmental work with them.

### The Curriculum

There is a general acceptance that the curriculum for youth work is now firmly embedded in the youth service and is, therefore, very much a “reality”.

### Having Fun

On the issue of whether youth work should be primarily about having fun, the irony is that *Transforming Youth Work: Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* does recognise some of the key motivating factors for young people to take part in youth service programme or activities. Annex 1, entitled “Youth Work Values”, starts off with the statement:

*Young people choose to be involved, not least because they want to relax, meet friends and have fun . . .*

*Resourcing Excellent Youth Services, 2002: 22*

### Outsourcing

The impressive turnaround achieved through “outsourcing” Tower Hamlets’ youth service suggests that this may be a model worthy of emulation by boroughs where a radical shift in the policies and practices of their youth service has become imperative.

### Improving Education

An outstanding “additional” outcome of rebuilding and reshaping the Youth Service in Tower Hamlets is the contribution it appears to have made to the remarkable recent improvement of young peoples’ educational achievement in the borough. The link between youth work and educational achievement deserves systematic and comprehensive investigation.

David Robins

Abdul Momen

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## **The Policy of John Lyon's Charity**

Grants are intended to be of as direct benefit as possible to young people who are resident in the beneficial area.

Grants are given to groups and organisations for the benefit of children and young adults from **Barnet, Brent, Camden, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea** and the **Cities of London and Westminster**.

Grants from the Charity are restricted to these areas and are made in accordance with certain rules covering allocation and consultation with these local authorities.

In general the Charity only gives grants to groups and organisations which are registered charities or who have automatic charitable status. The Charity does not give grants to individuals.

An information brochure setting out the grant-giving guidelines and giving details of the application procedure is available from the Charity office. Or you can contact our website: [www.johnlyonscharity.org.uk](http://www.johnlyonscharity.org.uk)

